

National Italian American Foundation Honoree

LINDA MASTANDREA

The NIAF Special Achievement Award

Born in Chicago, Ill., Linda Mastandrea was diagnosed with spastic diplegia cerebral palsy at the age of three. She grew up alongside her twin sister Laura; they did everything together. Except one thing — participate in sports or gym class.

Though Linda didn't compete in sports, she excelled in school, graduating in the top 10 in her high school class. She went on to earn her Bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois in 1986, and her Doctor of Law degree from Chicago-Kent College of Law in 1994. While an undergraduate at the University of Illinois, she learned about wheelchair sports and disability advocacy, and quickly became a force to be reckoned with.

From 1990-1999, Linda represented the United States at two Paralympic Games, three World Championships, the Pan American Games, and the Stoke-Mandeville Wheelchair Games, winning 15 gold and 5 silver medals in wheelchair track. She set national, world and Paralympic records numerous times during her career.

Off the track, Linda pursued her next goals — becoming an attorney and a published author. She has a practice in disability law and civil rights, representing people with disabilities who have experienced discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and access to government services and benefits. She has taught disability law, and lectured on the Americans with Disabilities Act and other disability laws nationwide.

Linda became a published author (with her sister Donna) when her first book was published in 2006, titled "Sports and the Physically Challenged: An Encyclopedia of People, Events and Organizations."

Linda has received numerous awards and accolades, most recently as the first female Paralympian inducted into the National Italian American Sports Hall of Fame. She was named one of Crain's Chicago Business "Forty Under 40"; received the International Olympic Committee President's Disabled Athlete Award and the David Award from the Italo-American National Union; and was named an Outstanding Woman Leader in Sports by the YWCA of DuPage, in Illinois, just to name a few.

Linda serves on numerous boards and committees sharing her expertise and experience. She is a member of AT&T's Advisory Panel on Access and Aging, and a member of the City of Chicago's Building Board of Appeals. She sits on the IPC Legal and Ethics committee and the board of Access Living. She serves as secretary of the Midwest Olympians and Paralympians and 2nd vice president of Variety International Paralympic Committee Legal and Ethics Committee. Most recently, Linda was proud to

be part of the Chicago 2016 organization and presentation team that pursued the Olympic and Paralympic Games for the city of Chicago. She had the honor of presenting alongside President Barack Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama, and Chicago's Mayor Richard M. Daley.